

Benefits of Mindfulness

Dr. Carrie Brennan: Mindfulness has its roots in Buddhist philosophy, but it made its way into secular society in the late '70s, early '80s when a psychologist named Jon Kabat-Zinn introduced the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center. And since then, we've had a growing body of literature that suggests tons of benefits to practicing mindfulness, and there are many resources that you can explore, and certainly lots of studies that you can read. But what I'd like to focus on is the benefits of mindfulness specifically for preschool teachers.

First, as a preschool teacher, one of your primary roles is to be a careful observer. It's through observation and assessment that we learn how children are progressing developmentally. But if you're in the classroom and your mind is in a blizzard, it can become really difficult to pick up on those meaningful cues that children are giving you about their learning and your teaching.

Second, a lot of teachers may not realize this, but the mood that you're in when you enter a classroom has a really big impact on how the day is going to go. The more capable you are of staying calm in stressful situations, the more calm everything will go in the classroom.

And third, when we're not being mindful or when we're being mindless, we tend to respond to challenging situations from a place of emotion, and when that happens, we run the risk of doing things that we may later regret.

So let's imagine that you are feeling pretty stressed out in the classroom. Your mind is in a blizzard, you've got a lot going on, and now a child presents a challenging behavior. In this moment, if you're not in control of your emotions, you might respond pretty quickly. Right? You might have an enormous response to that. You might snap, you might say something that you might later regret. If you're being mindful, on the other hand, and you take that deep breath, you're more likely to be able to understand that challenging behavior for its deeper meaning, take a deep breath, and then help that child work through it in a way that's going to be helpful and meaningful.